



## UNEP OECPR HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 26 MARCH 2014

On Wednesday morning, delegates convened in plenary to consider draft decisions, as well as progress reports on the work of the Environment Management Group (EMG), the mid-term review of the Montevideo Programme IV, and the state of the environment. In the afternoon delegates continued consideration of the state of the environment before addressing chemicals and wastes, and a draft decision on promoting air quality through UNEP.

### **PREPARATION OF DRAFT DECISIONS FOR ADOPTION BY UNEA**

CPR Vice-Chair Rosemary Semafumu-Mukasa (Uganda) chaired discussions throughout the day.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RIO+20 OUTCOME:**

Kenya, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, tabled a draft decision recalling GC decision 27/2, which provides for a 10-member UNEA Bureau, composed of two representatives from each of the five regions. He said the draft text calls for the GC decision to be adopted prior to electing the Bureau.

### **PROMOTING AIR QUALITY THROUGH UNEP:**

Introducing a draft decision on promoting air quality through UNEP, the US noted new science points at poor outdoor air quality being the world's greatest environmental hazard and the cause of death for 3.7 million people in 2012. He stressed UNEP's "critical and unique" role, saying it needs to be "considerably expanded" to allow UNEP to contribute to global solutions.

Many delegates welcomed the draft decision and its further consideration. MEXICO, supported by URUGUAY, stressed the importance of regional cooperation in reducing atmospheric pollution. The EU asked for clarification on proposed actions, and their implications for UNEP's POW and budget.

Noting that solutions to air quality problems are nationally driven, CHINA expressed concern about the invitation to governments to report on their national efforts to improve air quality, saying this is the first time such a request has been made since the establishment of UNEP, and cautioning against creating a precedent.

UZBEKISTAN outlined transboundary pollution issues and sought clarification on UNEP's role and mandate to set standards, as well as the budgetary implications of modernizing industrial capacities at national level.

Responding to comments, the US stressed the need to build national capacity with UNEP support, and encouraged comments and inputs from interested delegations towards a revised decision to be considered by UNEA.

### **CONSIDERATION OF POLICY MATTERS**

**EMG:** Michele Candotti, UNEP, introduced document

UNEP/EA.1/3/Add.2, highlighting EMG's work on, *inter alia*: advancing the sustainability of UN operations; coordinating peer reviews of environmental management within individual UN entities; and responding to emerging environmental issues.

JAPAN, with the US, EU, BRAZIL, NEW ZEALAND, NORWAY, SWITZERLAND and others, welcomed the work of the EMG in coordinating environmental matters, but reiterated concerns about duplication of UNEP's POW on system-wide strategies. With SWITZERLAND and URUGUAY, he requested clarification on the scope and mandate of the EMG Issue Management Group on chemicals and on the link with the work of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC).

BRAZIL questioned whether UNEA should decide on detailed thematic questions regarding the EMG's work, or leave this to the Secretariat.

The EU called for a strong role for the EMG in conveying messages to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and for monitoring MEA implementation at the national level. KENYA called for a focus on concrete achievements in the report and highlighted UNEA's role in strengthening and giving political support to the work of the EMG.

CHILDREN & YOUTH highlighted growing youth migration linked to environmental degradation and called for greater attention to education, capacity development and social protection for youth in green economy strategies.

Highlighting new research on the impact of chemicals on children's brain development, a representative of WOMEN welcomed a UNEP scoping study on women and chemicals.

Responding to the issues raised, Candotti assured delegates that UNEP is committed to finding the most "intelligent and feasible" approaches to ensure environmental management issues are addressed within a complex institutional setting.

With regard to chemicals, Fatoumata Keita-Ouane, UNEP, noted that terms of reference for the Issue Management Group are still under development, but will incorporate waste issues. Noting 2014 is an important year for this cluster, she stressed the need to bring together all the intelligence available in order to inform the post-2015 process, adding that the EMG is cooperating closely with the IOMC and other relevant agencies in this regard.

On drylands, the Secretariat reported that the EMG continues to work closely with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the UN Development Group in monitoring implementation at national level.

**MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE MONTEVIDEO PROGRAMME IV:** Bakary Kante, Director, Division of Environmental Law and Conventions, UNEP, introduced the report on a process for the mid-term review of the Fourth Programme for the Development and Periodic Review



of Environmental Law (Montevideo Programme IV), and developments in advancing justice, governance and law for environmental sustainability (UNEP/EA.1/3/Add.3). He said the Montevideo Programme has been a crucial pillar of UNEP's activities since 1982, and it has ensured that today environmental law is an integral part of the rule of law at the national and international level.

BRAZIL questioned the future of the Programme, asking how it will contribute to the development of sustainable consumption and production.

Acknowledging the importance of the mid-term review, the EU, supported by the US, NORWAY and SWITZERLAND, expressed doubts on the need for a separate UNEA decision on undertaking the review.

CANADA, supported by NORWAY and URUGUAY, asked for clarification on the process for the mid-term review.

EGYPT, supported by SENEGAL, stressed the need for capacity building in developing countries for environmental policies and legislation. With BOLIVIA, he called for clarification on terminology and mandates related to concepts such as environmental crime.

On the green economy and establishing targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, CUBA emphasized the lack of technological and human capacities in developing countries.

BOLIVIA expressed concern on the approach of linking the environment with human rights and peace and security issues, saying this might lead to discussing the environment in restricted fora to which developing countries lack access.

The US requested UNEP to revise the report to focus solely on an "efficient and effective" process for the mid-term review, instead of including a summary of UNEP activities, which might prejudge the review. She also called for the Secretariat to complete the review without convening open-ended meetings. The Center for International Environmental Law, on behalf of some MAJOR GROUPS, urged UNEA to make a strong statement regarding the centrality of the right to a healthy environment to implementing a rights-based approach to the environmental rule of law.

Ibrahim Thiaw, Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, concluded assuring participants that the revised report will be shorter, sharper and include all their recommendations.

**STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT:** Jacqueline McGlade, Chief Scientist, UNEP, introduced the draft documents on the state of the environment (UNEP/EA.1/4) and UNEP-Live (UNEP/EA.1/4/Add.1). She said the ongoing process towards GEO 6 will be more participatory than before and discussed the UNEP-Live approach of managing information at its source, saying the platform could include live data feeds from countries. She noted this could bring together expert and traditional knowledge, as well as integrate regional perspectives.

Many delegates welcomed UNEP-Live, and some requested clarification on how it relates to the GEO 6 process. Several delegates emphasized the need for capacity building to support developing countries, and for information in the main UN languages. Greece, for the EU, encouraged UNEP to underline how countries can benefit from developing the evidence base for UNEP-Live.

IRAQ welcomed efforts to help countries assess the impacts of nuclear facilities.

CHINA, NORWAY, SWITZERLAND and the US stressed the need to use robust data. NORWAY requested UNEP to provide guidelines on conducting environmental assessments, before launching the GEO 6 process, in line with the previous GC decision.

ARGENTINA said the process should provide useful information for countries and should not set environmental standards.

SWITZERLAND proposed that GEO 6 should report on progress towards internationally agreed environmental goals.

NEW ZEALAND welcomed the announcement of a GEO Small Island Developing States (SIDS) report, in addition to other regional reports, saying this will support the Third International Conference on SIDS in Samoa in September 2014.

BRAZIL requested UNEP to have its emissions gap report peer reviewed.

On data collection and quality, McGlade emphasized the importance of "getting it right from the beginning," noting the role of citizen science and the possibility for creating a "Lego kit" to assist countries in sampling their environmental data, adding that air and water quality are priorities. She proposed holding a multi-stakeholder meeting before the first UNEA to discuss global environmental trends for GEO 6, in addition to the regional processes. To avoid duplication, she said GEO 6 would make use of existing regional environmental assessments in North America and Europe.

Delegates discussed how to move forward on the EU's omnibus proposal, merging draft text on the science-policy interface, state of the environment, and UNEP-Live. Interested delegates met for informal discussions in the evening.

**CHEMICALS AND WASTE MANAGEMENT:** Tim Kasten, Deputy Director, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation, UNEP, introduced three documents: the progress report on implementation of GC decision 27/12 on chemicals and waste management (UNEP/EA.1/5), the outcome document on the terms of reference of the special programme for strengthening national level implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions (UNEP/EA.1/5/Add.1) and the Executive Director's report on the long-term sound management of chemicals and wastes (UNEP/EA.1/5/Add.2). Semafumu-Mukasa noted that two omnibus draft decisions from the US and Switzerland would also be discussed.

JAPAN, with CHINA, the US, and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, expressed satisfaction with the recent adoption of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

The US urged focusing on emerging issues and avoiding old discussions such as those on lead and cadmium.

The EU, with many others, supported the need for an omnibus decision. Uruguay, for G77/CHINA, supported addressing the bracketed text with a view to finalizing the draft decision.

ARGENTINA, with CUBA, COLOMBIA and SOUTH AFRICA, said the Swiss omnibus draft decision should not prejudge the outcome of the Open Working Group on SDGs. Discussions on the two omnibus decisions continued informally in the evening.

#### **IN THE BREEZEWAYS**

Rain spattered the breezeways as delegates got down to the nitty-gritty of discussing draft decisions for UNEA to consider when it meets in June. While some continued to voice concerns about organizing any parallel discussions, now, by mid-week point, most delegations caved in to necessity. The circulation of draft omnibus text by the EU on the science-policy interface lent impetus to some informal consultations in the evening. Meanwhile, in another room, other delegates pored over chemicals text. "At the end of the day, there's not much choice, we just have to get on with it," said one delegate.

However, the observation made on Monday, that "you cannot play the game without first setting the rules," appeared increasingly prophetic as the afternoon plenary ended somewhat chaotically, simply running out of time for a planned hour-long discussion on the budget and POW.

It remains to be seen if procedural issues will bog down the OECPR for the rest of the week, though at least one delegate suggested that some concerns are misplaced, since it is UNEA that is the decision-making body. "The OECPR is not making decisions," he said. "We just aim to make progress on some discussions."